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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ADDIS ABABA 003276

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SUBJECT: ARAB LEAGUE MEMBERS PRESS FOR ROLE ON SOMALIA

REF: ADDIS ABABA 1056

Classified By: AMBASSADOR DONALD YAMAMOTO. REASONS: 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (C) Summary. In the third in a series of U.S. Embassy Addis hosted meetings with the Arab League Ambassadors (Reftel), Arab colleagues pressed for an international conference on Somalia, and a greater Arab League mediating role, including discussion on troops and financial assistance for peacemaking and peacekeeping troops for Somalia. The Ambassadors underscored that the statement by Ethiopia to remove its troops from Somalia by the end of the year makes it imperative for the international community to provide a stabilization force, and that the departure of Ethiopian forces would lead to a major crisis in Somalia, and allow extremists a platform for regional terrorist operations. They cautioned that securing financial assistance and troop contributions for Somalia would be difficult, made more so by the divisions within the Somali Transitional Federal Government (TFG) between President Yusuf and Prime Minister Nur Adde, which did not instill confidence that the TFG could effectively address the issues of governance and extremism. The Arab Ambassadors urged better coordination with the Arab League by the InterGovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and for Ethiopia to reach out to the Arab states for assistance, noting that Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles and Foreign Minister Seyoum have avoided meeting with the Arab Ambassadors for the last several months. The U.S. Ambassador that same day raised the issue with Prime Minister Meles who agreed to meet with the Arab Ambassadors soon. End Summary.

An Arab League Role

¶2. (C) Ambassadors from various Arab League member states met December 3 at the U.S. Ambassador's Residence in the third in a series of U.S. Embassy-hosted meetings to discuss the recent announcement that Ethiopian forces would depart Somalia by the end of the year. The Ambassadors warned that Ethiopia's departure would lead to a major regional crisis, and potentially enable extremists to take over Somalia and use it as a platform to expand the scope of terrorist operations in neighboring states. Egyptian Ambassador Tarek Ghoneim suggested a joint African Union-Arab League call, with U.S. support, for an international conference on Somalia, focusing on enhancing coordination and financing of a peacemaking as well as peacekeeping force. The Charges from Sudan (Akuei Bona Malwal) and Libya (Saleh Sahbon) and the Moroccan Ambassador (Abdel Jebbar Brahime) noted that Arab states would participate under an Arab League banner, in coordination with the African Union. The Ambassadors cautioned that money will be difficult to secure but

essential for the sustainability of such a force. The Ambassadors said such a force needs to be deployed quickly to support the Ugandan and Burundian African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) peacekeeping force when Ethiopian forces depart Somalia.

13. (C) The U.S. Ambassador noted that Ethiopia had pressed for Arab League funding for AMISOM forces and that some Arab League member states had been approached without much success. The Egyptian Ambassador replied by criticizing IGAD for failing to reach out effectively to Arab League states on the Somalia crisis, suggesting that IGAD ignored the Arab states until recently. IGAD must work quickly and more cooperatively and jointly with the Arab League states otherwise the response from the Arab League will not be positive. Further all the Arab Ambassadors present stated that Ethiopia was not receptive to an Arab League role and needed to be more supportive of the Arab League. Yemeni Ambassador Gazem Abdulkhaleq Alaghbari noted that Ethiopia's decision to break diplomatic ties with Qatar last summer was never discussed or raised with the Arab Ambassadors prior to the announcement. Even following the announcement, Prime Minister Meles and Foreign Minister Seyoum did not respond to calls for meetings with the Arab Ambassadors. The group was unanimous in their criticism of Ethiopian officials for failing to explain its actions and conveying a hostile message of non-cooperation with the Arab states.

It is a Somali Problem

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14. (C) The Yemeni Ambassador noted that during the recent meeting between Prime Minister Meles and President Saleh in Sana'a over the weekend, President Saleh remarked that the TFG government could be more effective if President Yusuf was replaced. His failure to speak and work cooperatively with his own Prime Minister, Nur Adde, made the TFG ineffectual and a barrier to resolving the Somalia crisis. Ultimately, the Yemeni Ambassador said, this is a Somali problem and must be resolved by the Somalis themselves. The Somali Ambassador Said Yusuf Nuur countered by noting that outside support and financial assistance was critical to stabilize Somalia, and allow the TFG to function.

15. (C) The Arab Ambassadors jointly remarked that the stumbling block to forming an Arab League-African Union peacemaking and peacekeeping force was finance. But more important, few countries would contribute to such a force because of the TFG's failure to instill confidence as a result of the lack of cohesion within the TFG, and the bickering between President Yusuf and Prime Minister Nur Adde. The Yemeni Ambassador said Yusuf's solution to problems is always to fire the Prime Minister. The real solution, the Arab Ambassadors said, was for Yusuf to face the Somali crisis head on, build strong constituencies, gain international trust and confidence, and work with his own people to forge a strong unified government.

Comment

16. (C) The U.S. Ambassador immediately raised with Prime Minister Meles later in the afternoon that the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister meet with the Arab League Ambassadors. Meles agreed and said he would respond to the group shortly. The Arab Ambassadors noted the gravity of the departure of Ethiopian forces and seemingly deteriorating situation in Somalia, but remained hesitant to advise their Arab capitals to take a lead in providing troops and finances for operations in Somalia. The Ambassadors noted that the Arab League Secretariat was meeting in Cairo, and it was up to IGAD and the African Union to press the Arab League leadership, and to enhance coordination among the AU, Arab League, IGAD, EU, and U.S. on this issue. End Comment.

